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A
S E R M O N

ON THE
PROPRIETY AND IMPORTANCE
OF
PUBLIC WORSHIP,

Delivered at the Close of the Sunday-Evening Lecture
for the Winter-Season, at the *Old Jewry*,

ON *SUNDAY*, MARCH 28, 1790.

BY JOSEPH FAWCETT. *h*

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To the GENTLEMEN of the COMMITTEE
for conducting the Sunday-Evening Lec-
ture at the Old Jewry.

*I*N performance of my promise, I present to you a discourse, which has really nothing to recommend it, but very plain, very common-place, though very important, truth. This latter consideration is sufficient to reconcile me to the publication of it, and even to take from me the right of refusing it. I will not, however, compliment my fortitude so far as to affect that, in complying with your request, I have had to conquer the dread of criticism. I run no risks; I feel no fears; having neither the ingratitude to doubt, that those, who have always heard me with indulgence, will, with equal indulgence, read me; nor the vanity, to imagine that, when compositions of this nature, from their number, meet with so much neglect, these pages will pass under any other than the partial eyes of my friends. The circulation of a Sermon is but the silent and private circuit of a manuscript. Without therefore deprecating public severity, where public judgement will not be given, or attempting to shelter under apology what obscurity will sufficiently screen; I lay these few lines before you, gentlemen, in particular, and my friends in general, with the sincerest wishes that they may confirm your convictions of the truth they contain, and with the warmest thanks for that zealous support, to which I am indebted for a degree of professional encouragement that has exceeded my most sanguine expectations.

I am, gentlemen,
your much-obliged friend,
and humble servant,

JOSEPH FAWCETT.



HEBREWS X. 25.

NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF
YOURSELVES TOGETHER AS THE MAN-
NER OF SOME IS.

ALL nations, in all ages, have made
a practice of assembling themselves
together, for the purpose of worshipping
God. In every language under heaven, the
pardon of sin, and the protection of Pro-
vidence, have been publicly implored; and
common benefits, with united praise, ac-
knowledgeed. In different places, religion
has worn very different forms, but has,
B every

every where, made a public appearance. This impulse of nature to make, in some mode or other, devotion visible, and to meet one another in religion, all mankind have concurred to indulge. In the approbation and countenance of this decent custom, all classes of secular condition, all casts of national character, all ranks of intellect, and all forms of government, have harmoniously consented : and, to the collected wisdom and authority of man in support of it, almighty God has added his own.

It is then a circumstance not more melancholy than remarkable, that a practice, thus prompted by nature, approved by reason, and prescribed by revelation, should be most neglected by the most enlightened professors of the most luminous of all religions. In times of less religious light and liberality than these, the temple was a place of universal resort ; by persons of inferior information upon religious subjects, to what many Christians have now attained, it is conscientiously resorted to still ;
but

but by those who are most distinguished by religious knowledge it is too much deserted.

To me it appears to be at once a subject for sorrow and for surprise, that the increase of religious light should diminish religious warmth; that the noon of truth should shed a damp upon devotion, unknown to the night of error; that, where Christianity is most uncorrupted, and has least reason to hide her head, the public exhibition of her should be most neglected; that the visibility of the church should decrease in proportion as the beauty of truth adorns her.—Why is it, Christians, that we cannot depart from superstition and enthusiasm, without bidding farewell to religion and decency?

Our Bibles forbid us to “forfake the
“ assembling of ourselves together;”—our fore-fathers have built us places of public worship, and set us an example of frequenting them,—our government has set apart a portion of time for the performance of this

office,—our neighbours upon the continent, our brethren of mankind in all parts of the world, whatever errors we ascribe to their religion, are regular in their observance of its public rites:—but we, at once, disregard the directions of Scripture, — depart from the piety of our laws,—degenerate from the custom of our ancestors,—dissent from the devotion of foreigners;— and those hours, that should be devoted to the public worship of almighty God, are, in *England*, sacred to diversion and consecrated to recreation.

At the close of this our temporary association in the celebration of divine worship, I know not how I can better improve this parting hour than by employing it in earnestly recommending to you a constant and serious attendance upon the public ordinances of religion; by which I would not be understood to inculcate, as a *duty*, the dedication of *this part* of this day to public worship. For, although I have undertaken to conduct an evening service, from a desire to promote the improvement of any
 who

who may be disposed to attend upon it, yet, I have always been free to confess, whenever I have had occasion to mention them, that I consider religious services of this nature in no other light than that of *discretionary* offices of devotion, meritorious in those who engage in them with an honest desire to derive improvement from them, but in no respect binding upon any. What I would now exhort you to, as being your "bounden duty and service," is an habitual and devout attendance upon the regular service of the several churches or chapels to which you may respectively belong.

In recommending public worship to you, I intreat your attention to the following considerations.

I set out with asking you, if, divesting yourselves of prejudice, and regarding with an impartial eye the public worship of God, you do not immediately perceive an **INNATE RECTITUDE** in it? To adore together the Maker of all,—for mercies, in common enjoyed,

joyed, to bless God in company,—for mercies, in common wanted, to ask with united supplication,—is a custom which carries with it at first sight an air of beauty and decency. It is right in itself, that private necessities and private obligations should be privately expressed before God. It is right in itself, that domestic prayer should implore, and domestic praise acknowledge, domestic blessings ; and it is also, and for the same reasons, right in itself, that the public voice should cry to heaven for public mercies, and that those who enjoy the felicities of the same climate, the protection of the same laws, the possession of the same liberties, the illuminations of the same religion, should together return their thanks to the Almighty for them. The propriety of this practice is rather an object of immediate perception than of labored proof. I will not injure the subject by a formal argument ; let any man, with an unprejudiced eye and an entire surrender of his mind to the power of native sentiment and sensibility,

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lity, contemplate for a moment the public appearance of this day, — the still street, — the closed shop, — the concealed merchandise, — the deserted mart, — the silent exchange, — the solitary theatre, — the business of this world at a stop, — all terrestrial pursuits making a solemn pause, — the eyes of mankind turned away at once from earth, and lifted up to heaven; — nobles, statesmen, magistrates, monarchs, falling down, with mechanics, peasants, and paupers, before the throne of HIGH HEAVEN, crying out, as with one voice, — “ Behold, O Lord
 “ God omnipotent, our little distinctions
 “ all blended in thy presence, — here we all
 “ are *equal*, — for, here we all are *nothing* ! ” —
 Let any man of an uncorrupted mind, who has any feeling of decorum, who is at all susceptible of what is beautiful and becoming, survey this scene, if it be possible, with an attentive eye, without an intuitive discernment and instinctive feeling of its inherent rectitude : — I leave him to the voice of nature.

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But this institution is not only proper in itself, but productive of great good.—Permit me to point out to you the religious and moral ADVANTAGES to be derived from public worship, by those who attend upon it, in the exercise of corresponding sentiments and feelings. This supposition I beg you to keep in your eye, as I shall carry it along with me in all that I have to say under this head.

In the first place, public worship has an obvious tendency to ANIMATE DEVOTION. Upon the supposition, that he, who absents himself from the social exercises of piety, is sincere in his profession, to preserve the spirit of religion without the assistance of its ceremonies, he certainly overlooks the most powerful of all methods of stirring it up from time to time.

Our sense of the divine *greatness* is inconceivably enlivened by public acts of homage. As the strong expression of any sentiment renders it more striking to the mind that is incapable of representing it to itself in so
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lively a manner ; public worship being, in the apprehension of such creatures as we, more expressive and representative of the divine Majesty than any private honors we are able to offer, is the most powerful method we can employ of impressing that idea upon our minds. Each individual is penetrated by that potent expression to which each contributes, but which none can alone supply. The testimony of a community, at one moment, to the supremacy of God, is more loud and rousing to the mind than the small voice of pious soliloquy. We associate, with a multitude, ideas of peculiar solemnity ; we conceive that the worship, which arises to the Almighty from a concourse of people, gives him more glory than that which is paid him by detached individuals. When we assemble together to set forth his most worthy praise, we seem to ourselves to lay upon his altar our most magnificent offering !—This, you will say, is a feeling in which there is more of fancy than philosophy ;—be it so,—we are crea-

tures of feeling and of fancy, and we never shew our folly more than, when aspiring to wisdom, we endeavour to get above the ground upon which we were made to walk, and affect to fly without wings. Those persons who despise public worship, considered in this light, act inconsistently with the feelings by which, upon other occasions, they allow themselves to be governed. Can any real addition of glory, they ask, be rendered to the Deity by the pageantry of public homage? Is the great Spirit to be flattered by the appearance of a croud before the footstool of his throne?—I will answer the question by another!—Do popular meetings and public festivals convey any pleasure to those deceased patriots, in honour of whom they are held? “Can honor’s voice provoke the silent dust?”—Yet those persons who affect a totally dispassionate and disembodied spirituality upon religious subjects, on occasions of this nature, abandon their false refinement, and surrender themselves up to their imagination
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and affections. Without considering the insensibility of the dead to the respect that is paid them, they give way to a feeling they have, that they are doing honor to departed merit; they are pleased with an opportunity of giving vent, to the veneration they feel, in the most copious and pointed manner they are capable of. — Now, as combined endeavours of this nature, to honor those among the virtuous dead who have left communities their debtors, although not attended with any real benefit to the objects of them, and although they reflect no more real glory upon their memory than the commemorations of private parties and domestic circles, have yet a beneficial influence upon those persons themselves who pay these posthumous honors, by kindling in their minds, at such moments, a more lively admiration and prouder emulation of the characters they thus forcibly applaud: in like manner, though the collective worship of mankind renders no more real glory to the Almighty than the sepa-

rate praise of solitary worshippers, it tends, notwithstanding, to elevate our conceptions of his Majesty. We may coldly reflect in solitude, that God is the sovereign of the world; but, when we see his servants on every side of us acknowledging his dominion, when we behold our neighbours around us going up to their respective temples, to "worship, and bow down, and to kneel, before the Lord their Maker," and reflect, that our countrymen in general are, at the same moment, employed in the same manner; the idea of the universal King appears before us with all its state and splendor about it! We see him, as it were, seated upon his throne! A kneeling nation, a prostrate people, impresses us with a profounder reverence for "the great and only Potentate!"—Let not this inspiring spectacle be impoverished by any absence of ours from the assemblies of religion!

The veneration of man for his Maker stands in need of pungent stimulation from time to time. Every religion has had recourse

course to some kind or other of it. The Greek adorned his temple and decorated his worship with a profusion of ornament, that, in the performance of his religious offices, every thing around him might remind him of the grandeur of his gods, and enliven his pious reverence. The Jew erected, for his great Jehovah, a stupendous palace; he felt for his ark a deeper respect when it rested in that "house of cedar" than when it "dwelt within curtains." He beheld the big, the vast, veneration of his country for the living God expressed in that ample dome, that swelling effort of exhausted art, that dazzling display of boundless wealth! He beheld, as it were, the collected riches and ingenuity of the world presented to "the King of all the earth." The splendor of the offering illustrated to his eye the glory of the object. And, so far as he did not suffer himself to suppose, that the magnificence of the place increased the merit of the worship, or that either the divine presence or propitiousness was contracted within

within those walls, spacious as they were,—while he permitted the grandeur of the edifice only to assist in lifting his mind to that “ high and lofty one, who inhabiteth “ eternity,” and whom “ the heaven of “ heavens cannot contain,”—while he allowed it only to enliven that sentiment of the divine omnipresence which accompanied the consecration of that celebrated house of prayer,—he might be said to have derived a devotional advantage from it. Considered in this view, in the dimensions, the construction, and materials, of that costly fabric, there was more than art, there was more than wealth,—there was also wisdom. And, although in this more advanced period of the human history, when the human mind is become more enlightened and manly in religion ; and under the Christian dispensation, whose genius is simplicity ; it would be idle to insist upon the necessity of any auxiliaries of this nature to pious humility and awe ; yet he, who should declare himself to be solemnized, and assisted in
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the exercise of a proper reverence in the presence of his Maker, by any operation upon his senses, whether the awful structure of a temple, or a serious piece of music, or the posture of kneeling, or any ceremony of a sober, decent, and significant, nature, would make a confession, of which I know not that he would have any reason to be ashamed, though a person of understanding and a professor of Christianity : at the same time it must be confessed, that it is the tendency of much ceremony to seduce into superstition and to dissipate reflection, and more especially of that which is of an excessively exhilarating nature, to kindle a transport in which the mind is tempted to rest as the whole of piety, to attract that attention to external objects, which ought to be engaged by spiritual, and, like the potent provocatives that are applied to the sensual appetites, to promote the untimely decay of religious passion. — But, that excitement to devout veneration, which I am now recommending to your use, will only
 gently

gently stimulate, without either corrupting or exhausting the heart, and is of a nature so simple, that I may venture to propose it to you without running any risk of affronting the refinement and purity of your religion.—I am not inviting your attention to the grandeur of architecture, —the pomp of sacrifice,—the grove's religious gloom,—the censer's fragrant cloud, —the skilful swell of solemn song, —the sacred concert of psalteries and harps,—the trumpet's penetrating tones,—or “ the high sounding cymbals : ” —I call not your attention to the *place* of worship, to the *mode* of worship,—but to the *worshippers* themselves. —Behold! a convocation of intelligent creatures in the presence of their Creator! —the noblest works of God assembled together to adore their Maker! —all ranks and conditions convened to acknowledge the dominion of God! —the lordly knee bent before the “ Lord of Lords ! ” —the crowned head uncovered in the august presence-room of the great King! —“ Thine, O
“ Lord,

“ Lord, is the greatness, and the power,
 “ and the majesty, and the victory; for, all
 “ that is in the earth, and all that is in the
 “ heavens, is thine; thine is the kingdom,
 “ O God, and thou art exalted as head
 “ above all!” This sublime sentence—you
 may read in your Bible,—you may say it to
 yourselves;—but, when you hear society say
 it in this solemn and audible tone, all the
 sentiment of it sinks into the soul with its
 whole weight.—So much religious assistance
 as this we have none of us any reason to be
 ashamed of receiving from the senses.—So
 much religious scenery as this is a needful
 stimulative to the pious reverence of man;
 and it is of itself a sufficient one,—tempe-
 rate, but powerful,—most sober and chaste,
 yet most striking and impressive.

Nor has the society of our fellow-crea-
 tures, in our acts of worship, a more pow-
 erful tendency to enlarge our conceptions
 of the divine greatness than to enliven our
 views of the *goodness* of God. I enter my
 closet,—I think there of personal benefits,—

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it is, doubtless, an extensive field for gratitude to traverse;—I am compelled to cry out, “ How precious have been thy thoughts unto me, O God, how great is the sum of them ! ” — But, when I enter my temple, my admiration of divine benignity rises !—I meet a concourse of creatures, to whom the Almighty has extended the care and kindness he has shewn to me !—I hear a chorus of testimonies to the goodness of God !—The monuments of his mercy multiply around me !—I look up not only to *my* Father, not only to *my* Friend, but to the Friend and Father of *all* !

And as the company of our fellow-worshippers operates in these ways to animate our ideas of the divine Majesty and bounty, it may be added, that social worship employs the power of *sympathy* to enliven *all* the sentiments and feelings of devotion.—The religious reverence and esteem, gratitude and trust, penitence and submission, which we feel together, we feel with double vivacity :—we are creatures of lively sympathies ;—

pathies;—in one another's joys, and griefs, and resentments, we experience a contagion;—we catch one another's hopes,—we catch one another's terrors,—and devotion also is capable of being caught;—we light our religious flame at each other's lamps.

Indeed the power of sympathy is such as makes it surprising that any persons, who pretend to the spirit of religion, should neglect to join in social worship, not only on account of the religious improvement, but likewise pleasure to be derived from it, by a mind that is really possessed of devotional sensibility, and capable of pious pleasure. One would imagine that, to his entertainment, who is susceptible of any in the contemplation of his Creator, the society of his fellow-creatures must make a considerable addition. We seek, in their company, an increase of all our other pleasures. In all our recreations, whether of an innocent or a criminal nature, we love to have companions. The sensualist requires the social circle as well as the sumptuous

tuous board. The admirer of music, or painting, or poetry, never so exquisitely enjoys the entertainment these elegant arts afford him as when others share it with him. And must not then the truly pious look up to heaven with double delight, when the eyes of their fellow-dependents upon providence are directed the same way? Am I uncharitable in suspecting the sincerity of him, who professes to preserve the sentiment of devotion in the absence of all ceremony, without pretending to deny that religious creed in which the public worship of this country is founded, and without being addicted to solitude in his other enjoyments? Who neglects devotional associations, without being in other respects unsocial? Who frequents musical meetings, dramatic meetings, festive meetings, and affects the hermit only in religion?—

But the beneficial influence of social offices of piety is not confined to devotion; CHARITY partakes of the benefit. By worshipping together, we learn to live together
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in amity. We meet one another at the footstool of divine benignity. There, if at all we enter into the sentiment of the situation, we cannot avoid regarding each other with a benignant eye. This association goes along with us into the world;—when we meet each other there, we remember where before we met, and kindness accompanies the recollection.

And, as social worship tends to enliven our devotional feelings and endear us to one another in this immediate and mechanical manner, it also ultimately promotes our moral improvement, by exciting a **FERVENT RECOLLECTION** of that **MORAL GOVERNMENT** of God, which is our fundamental motive to the whole of duty. This salutary recollection is not only implied in that supplicatory address to the Almighty, which is the substance of public worship, but is forcibly roused and rendered impressive by that preceptive address to man, and direct appeal to conscience, which is its customary appendage. The common apolo-

logy for absence from public instruction is this:—"The minister cannot tell me more than I already know."—Perhaps he cannot,—perhaps he cannot tell you so much;—but he, that wants not a teacher, may want a remembrancer. The first reception of truth is of no avail, if not followed by the retention of it; repetition therefore is as necessary as information. What most of us want is, not the first introduction of truth to our minds, but such a frequent recurrence of it as shall terminate in its residence there, and render it present and operative in the hour of action. We do not so much require to be acquainted as to be impressed with truth. We are not ignorant of God, we are not ignorant of duty; but, we are forgetful of God, we are forgetful of duty. I do not suppose that *any* of you want to be informed, that there is a God; that there is a providence; that forsaken sin shall be forgiven; that the buried body shall be raised; that a day is appointed for the trial of all mankind: I do
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not suppose that *any* of you require to be told that, in order to please God, it is necessary to do justice, to love mercy, to live soberly. — I take it for granted you are *all* acquainted with these *heads* of christian faith and christian practice. — *Some* of you, — *many* of you, — may be *more* enlightened. You may be critically acquainted with the Scriptures. You may be nice and clear casuists. You may understand the eternal foundation of morals. Philosophy may have concurred with revelation to confirm and fortify your faith in the being and providence of God. You may be perfectly acquainted with the evidences of Christianity, and able to defend it against the attacks of the infidel. — This may possibly be the case with many now present. — It is certainly the case with many in this enlightened age, who do not belong to either of the learned professions. In such an age, — in such a country, — in such a metropolis, — as this, — that preacher must possess more than a small portion of vanity, who, in looking round
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upon a numerous audience, does not believe it to be more than probable, that there are many around his pulpit, whom it is not in his power to instruct. — But the best informed Christian may be unmindful of his faith; the firmest believer may forget his religion; the clear conviction may be cold; may want the affecting view, the practical impression. — “ But I can perform this office for myself. I can collect my thoughts whenever I will; whenever I please, I can fix them upon religious truth; there is no necessity for going to church in order to reflect; I want no one to remind me of my duty, I can remind myself.” — No doubt any man may recollect himself whenever and wherever he pleases; — still, it is not pronouncing any very flattering panegyric upon the clergy, it is not paying them any very extravagant compliment to presume, that an order of men, whose sole profession it is to contemplate moral truth, — to survey it again and again, — to view it on all its sides, — to go round about it and observe

observe all its aspects,—to examine the passions of human nature,—to explore the passes to the human heart,—to study the arts of persuasion, and the methods of addressing peculiarities of temper and character with most effect;—it is not surely doing such an order of men more than justice to suppose, that they may sometimes be able to place religious and moral truths in some new *lights*, calculated to strike and stir the heart, in which they might not have presented themselves before to those, who, however liberally educated, and however disposed to employ a part of their leisure in reading and reflection, are, during the principal part of their time, engaged in active scenes; or to presume, that it may sometimes be in their power to press the practice of piety and virtue with an importunity and animation, more likely to rouse moral resolution, and urge to honorable action, than solitary and silent contemplation.

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Such then is the religious and moral benefit to be derived from an attendance upon the public ordinances of religion. From what I have said, I hope it is sufficiently evident that, supposing those persons, who neglect public worship, to employ every other method of promoting their improvement in piety and virtue, they yet pass over the most efficacious. But, alas! there is but too much room to fear, that those who neglect this, whatever their original intentions might be, do eventually neglect all others. I take it for granted, that he, who denies the necessity of public worship, denies also the necessity not only of all direct worship, but likewise of all *stated seasons* for serious reflection. All these branches of religious discipline stand or fall together; they all proceed upon the same principle, the necessity of *regularly* returning meditation. Those, therefore, who suppose any one of these exercises to be of no importance, would, I conclude, allow none of them to be of any. The profession, the principle,

principle, of such persons, with respect to virtuous cultivation, if they have any at all, must be to leave religious consideration to *accidental leisure*; and his knowledge of human nature is very small, who requires to be told, that that business, whether it be spiritual or secular, which has not an appointed and appropriate place in the regular arrangement of our engagements and the original distribution of our time, will be likely to have no place at all. If “all things are” not “done in order,” many things must be left undone.

Perhaps the enemy to public worship will say, “what necessity is there for any religious reflection at all?”—To this confession, indeed, he must retreat, if he be pushed and pursued upon the subject;—to this ground he must retire:—“What need have I of prayer or meditation? I pay my debts,—I obey the laws,—I practise neither fraud nor violence,—I sow no seeds of sedition among my fellow-citizens,—I foment no factions,—I lead

“ a harmless life, and hold a spotless name.”

—This is plausible language, language that will obtain the plaudit of more than half mankind. He who is not satisfied with such a character, they will say, must be a sour, severe, satyrical, a morose, melancholly, moralist. Such names must I, however, submit to be called. My conscience calls upon me to say,—my Bible commands me to declare,—and here, in the presence of that God who breathed that conscience into my breast and put that Bible into my hand, I solemnly pronounce,—that such a character as this, if it have nothing more to recommend it than moral neutrality, will be found wanting, when weighed in those balances of eternal justice, which, upon an appointed day, will publicly weigh us all.—If this be all of duty, duty may, no doubt, be done without the aid of any meditation at all; but, the moment we open our eyes upon the nature of virtue, that moment we must see the necessity of discipline.—What, then, is virtue, sincere, sterling, christian, virtue?—

virtue?—To this point the question comes:—Ask your conscience what it is,—consult the Scriptures that contain it, and, as soon as you are convinced, as after an impartial perusal of those passages you necessarily will be, that the temper required of us implies not only decency of manners but an habitual secret indulgence of supreme reverence and love, submission and trust, towards almighty God; a continual exercise of kind affections and good wishes for all mankind; such a decided and devoted regard to duty, as would be sufficient to subdue a powerful temptation to a deliberate violation of its dictates, and which in the absence of such temptations cannot content itself with innocence, but aspires to usefulness:—the moment you are convinced that this is the collected sense of the New Testament, you will want no additional conviction of the necessity of self-cultivation.—To conclude this head, which has insensibly swelled beyond the bounds I had prescribed, the more I consider human nature,
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the more I am convinced that, however beings above us of a more refined and spiritual nature, and dwelling under the more immediate and sensible government of God, may be able to maintain their virtuous ardour without attention to religious *seasons* and *ceremonies*; for such a creature as man, an incorporated spirit, engaged in occupations that divert him from religious truth, there is an absolute indispensable need of *formal* worship, *verbal* devotion, *periodical* recollection. In removing all ceremony from his religion, under an idea of refining it, he will reduce it to nothing. There is a degree, beyond which, if man attempt to rarify and subtilize his religion, he will cause it entirely to evaporate. Let it be remembered, that, if form occasion a coarseness in religion and take from the fineness and delicacy of it, it is nevertheless necessary, in such a nature as ours, to fix the feelings of religion, to prevent them from flying off, to condense them into character, and bind them in the breast; without this,

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though a few volatile and fleeting sentiments of piety may occasionally float through the mind, there will be no religious permanency and consistency.

But, admitting public worship to possess no intrinsic excellence; admitting it also to contain no advantage for them who stand in need of no religious information, — an habitual absence from it would still require an apology. It yet remains to be denied, that society owes to this institution that DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE which it enjoys; and DEPENDS upon it for its continuance.

Of that popular acquaintance with religious truth, which distinguishes christian from other times, this institution is the parent and the preserver. Whatever was the light which reason threw upon religious subjects, it might be said to have been “ put under a bushel ;” it glimmered in solitude, and gave no light to society. The religious science of pagan, like the erroneous sanctity of christian, lands, was a useless recluse, confined

confined in schools, concealed in academic groves. Christianity has "set upon a hill" what before was buried, has taken retired truth from the shades, placed her "upon the top of high places," and caused her to "put forth her voice," so that all the sons of men may hear it.* The religion of nature not only wanted proof, it wanted also a trumpet; Christianity has supplied both. By appointing a public and periodical proclamation of what it has discovered; by commanding every believer in it to make a public profession of his belief and surround the herald of religious truth, it has made a wise provision for the wide instruction of mankind. This institution is the beautiful aqueduct that conveys the waters of life to all parts of society. While this custom is kept up, even the incurious in religion will receive information. If the enquirers after truth are few, the followers of fashion are numerous, and, whatever be the cause of attendance upon public instruction, information will be the effect. A heathen philosopher

losopher might have judged for himself, how far it was his wisdom or duty to teach the truth he knew. The scholars whom he instructed were left to their discretion, whether they should spread what they had learned. A Deist in these days would have his own judgement only to ask, if he should join himself to a society professing natural religion, as a means of promoting the propagation of it. But a believer in Christianity is expressly commanded to connect himself with a Christian society for that end. A scholar of Christ is bound in duty to become a preceptor and publisher of what he has been taught, not only in an immediate manner by instructing his family, but also to provide for the instruction of all, by supporting the method which providence has appointed for this purpose. Every Christian is under an indispensable obligation to form a part of that vehicle, which God has appointed for the conveyance of the Gospel through all the earth and through all ages. Christianity maketh her friends her chariot,

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to bear her in triumph to the ends of the earth and to the end of time. He, therefore, who makes his religious knowledge his plea for refusing his hand to prop that institution, to which he either immediately or ultimately owes it, and which is necessary to convey it to others, will not find it an easy thing to clear himself from the charge either of ingratitude or inhumanity.—O man,—benighted in this region of intellectual darkness, wouldst thou withhold from thy brother the truth that has illuminated thee? — Is it not as if the nocturnal traveller should say, “now the lamp
 “ of night has lighted me home, let clouds,
 “ whenever they will, involve it. I want
 “ the silver guide no longer, nor care how
 “ soon it sets.”

Allow me to add, that public worship extends its beneficial influence even beyond the walls within which it is celebrated. In the ceremonies of religion God becomes visible to those who would not see him in his works, and who will not enquire

quire after him in his temple. The public commemoration of him is a memorial of him to those who refuse to join in it, and who, but for this, would never remember him at all, would entirely forget that "there is a God that judgeth in the world." Of such a total oblivion of him, and erasure of all religious impression, every imagination can paint the consequence,—the unbridled violence of the wicked,—the return of society to the woods.—It is well for those who would not have the flood-gates of human licentiousness unfolded, and that wild torrent, which yet obeys some limit, overflow with foaming impetuosity the earth, and sweep away all human security and peace,—that, once a week, almighty God "bows the heavens and comes down" before the eyes of the impious.

Such then are the claims of this institution to the zealous support of every faithful servant of God, and every true friend to himself and mankind. After having thus appealed to the ingenuous, if there be

not an innate grace and comeliness in it; and attempted to point out the powerful tendency it has to improve the virtue of those who attend upon it with a proper spirit,—to produce virtue in those who attend upon it in compliance with custom,—and to curb the vice of them that will not attend upon it at all:—I will conclude with reminding you of some peculiar circumstances, in which all before me stand, which lay you under *peculiar obligations* to practise this duty.

I. You are an ENLIGHTENED people. Such is the cloud of disgrace, which the ignorance of former worshippers of God has thrown over his worship, and which indeed some erroneous worshippers continue to cast over it still, as has given but too much countenance to the ridicule which free-thinkers have thrown at religion. It is in your power to rescue it from this infamy, and restore it to respect. Your education has raised you superior to superstition and enthusiasm. You see the absurdity of dark-
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ening and disfiguring this day, or this place,
 with a "sad countenance." You are con-
 vinced, that a chearful face, on this as well
 as every other day, is not more agreeable to
 the eye of man than acceptable in the sight
 of God. You perceive the blasphemy of
 considering the performance of ritual duties
 as a discharge from moral obligations. You
 are aware of the guilt and folly of deserting
 those secular offices, upon which yourselves
 and families depend for a decent subsistence,
 for daily and almost hourly public worship.
 You know that the sphere of usefulness is
 the most sacred temple of man; — that the
 shop, in which honest industry officiates, is
 consecrated ground; — that the board, upon
 which merchandise is viewed and money is
 counted, while the tongue of truth, while
 the balance of justice, is there, is an altar of
 religion; — that the worship of God, even
 on the day, and during the hour, devoted to
 his worship, is to give place, in all cases of
 competition, to works of humanity; — that
 charity keeps no sabbath; — that goodness
 only

only rests in the grave. These are your rational and manly sentiments. The duties of religion adorned with the manners arising from such sentiments, with innocent cheerfulness, honorable industry, and generous humanity, will banish the smile from the scorner's face, and force him to regard religion with reverence. Refuse not to render it this service. Decline not the opportunity you have of redeeming its decent ceremonies from disgrace. Do yourselves this honor. Signalize yourselves by this triumph. To be separate at once from the superstitious and the licentious, the austere and the giddy, the bigoted and the unprincipled; to unite, with religious decision, religious candour; to be serious in a way that levity cannot laugh at, and to exercise wisdom without being the mark of wit;—will be a distinction of all others the most flattering.

II. You are a HAPPY people. When we meet in the house of God, it is to render thanks for the benefits we have received in common.

common. To give thanks for them is to call them to remembrance, and revolve them in our minds. I should then think, that a people, distinguished from every other under heaven by national felicity, must not only feel a peculiar obligation to “ enter the “ gates of God with thanksgiving,” but must have a peculiar pleasure in the performance of an office which leads them to recollect and rejoice in their common happiness. I am not inviting into their temples, for the purpose of this commemoration, a people who are exposed to earthquake, to famine, to pestilence, to invasion, or to tyranny ;— but a people, whose air is salubrious,—whose ground is firm,—whose fields are fruitful, — whose government is free,—whose fortification is nature,—and whose guardian is God.—That this should be the spot where the song of social gratitude languishes,—this is not, Britons, as it ought to be.—“ Praise the Lord, O” happy people ! “ Praise thy God, O” enviable nation ! “ for, he hath strengthened
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“ the bars of thy gates : he hath blessed
 “ thy children within thee. He maketh
 “ peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with
 “ the finest of the wheat. He sheweth his
 “ word unto” Britain, “ his statutes and
 “ his judgements to” our isle. “ He hath
 “ not,” happiest of countries, “ dealt so
 “ with any other nation” as he has dealt
 with thee !

To conclude, — I am speaking, for the
 most part, to persons employed in TRADE,
 and RESIDENT in a very large, very busy,
 and very gay, METROPOLIS. I have said that
 the regular return of moral recollection,
 which it is one design of public worship to
 promote, is necessary to preserve the virtue
 of such a creature as man,—it is peculiarly
 necessary to persons in your situation. If
 the plea of moral independence, upon stated,
 forced, and formal, meditation on religious
 subjects, be allowed to any, let it be allow-
 ed to the literary man, who leads a con-
 templative life, amidst the shades of retire-
 ment and the silence of solitude. To his
 mind

mind moral reflections, among others, may in their turn spontaneously present themselves. — Or, if it be allowed to any who are engaged in external occupation, let it be allowed to the husbandman. There is a *quietude* in his employment, peculiarly favorable and naturally inviting to reflection. There is a *simplicity* in his life that is singularly friendly to self-collection and a sober mind. The works and influences of *nature* also are perpetually before his eyes, and may possibly sometimes force him to reflect upon the God of nature. Or let it be granted to the mariner, that “ goes down to the sea “ in ships, and does business in great waters,” he “ sees the works of the Lord, “ and his wonders in the deep.” To such persons there is at least a chance that sacred truth may sometimes occur without being called. But this plea cannot, with any shadow of plausibility, be urged by the mechanic, the tradesman, the merchant, in an immense and dissipated city. In this metropolis, shut out from the works of nature,

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and furrounded only by the works of art, here is nothing to remind you of the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God. You are reminded only of the wisdom and power of man. You are reminded of the ingenuity of inventors,—the skill of artificers,—the fancy of painters and sculptors,—the taste of architects,—the wit of poets,—the discoveries of philosophers,—the eloquence of orators,—the wisdom of legislators ;—but you see nothing of the Creator here, unless by the power of *inference* and reflection. Here is nothing that of itself, and in an irresistible manner, reminds you of HIS wisdom and HIS power.—Your attention is *attracted* to plans of profit and to proposals of pleasure ; you are *called* to the meeting of merchants and to the assemblies of pleasure ; but here is nothing to *draw* your thoughts to God and DUTY. You must *bend* and *force* your minds that way.

The rewards of rural industry, and safety in maritime situations, having a more close and direct connection with the blessing of providence

providence than mercantile prosperity, have a more powerful tendency to excite, of themselves, not only a *speculative* attention to the hand of heaven, but likewise the *feelings* of religious gratitude and trust. The tiller of the ground plows and sows,—his operation is at an end,—he cannot call one ray or one drop from heaven. In the descending shower he beholds the direct gift of providence. — In the sunshine of nature he sees the smile of heaven upon his fields.—“ If it would please God to send rain or “ to send sunshine” is the proverbial preface to all the wishes he expresses for an alteration in the weather. — The sailor also, when tossed by the tempest which God has raised, must look to God to appease it. He cannot bid a single billow subside, a single blast be still. “ Then they cry “ unto the Lord in their trouble, and “ he bringeth them out of their distresses. “ He maketh the storm a calm, so that “ the waves thereof are still.” But trade is entirely an *artificial* situation, in which a confluence of second causes obtrude them-

selves upon the attention, stand between God and man, and eclipse the first Mover of all things. By this cloud of surrounding instruments, the attention of the adventurer, in this walk of life, is apt to be totally occupied. In calculating his gains, his own diligence, skill, or speculation, are the objects that present themselves to his mind, to account for his success and to receive his compliments. "When his silver, and his gold, is multiplied, and all that he has is multiplied, then he says, in his heart, my own arm, and the might of my hand, hath gotten me this wealth." — "With my wisdom and with my understanding I have gotten me riches."

But, in such a situation as this, the surrounding scene is not only of such a nature as not immediately to suggest the idea of almighty aid; here is also a *multiplicity* and *succession* of objects, by which the thoughts are *scattered*, and consequently the necessity considerably increased for efforts of reflection. In the labors of

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of the field there is a *tranquillity* inviting to meditation. In a life devoted to these tasks there is also a *unity* of attention and pursuit, by which the mind is in no danger of being distracted: but the mercantile walk is perplexed with variety of plan; and large cities contain a croud of objects, that divide the mind and draw it from itself.

But, farther, in such a situation as yours, your attention is not only dissipated, so as to make it peculiarly necessary from time to time to collect your thoughts, and call them to those objects from which they are diverted; you are also peculiarly *tempted* to do wrong,—tempted, by interest, to injustice,—by rivalry, to envy,—by injury, to resentment,—by pleasure, to intemperance. Here is a scope for fraud to which the probity of the rustic is not exposed. — Here are irritating collisions of opposite interests, by which neither the busy peasant nor the musing solitary is discomposed. — Here are calls to voluptuousness which the villager does not hear.—I would not disgust you with coarse
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and indelicate insinuation. I will not suppose you in any danger of being betrayed into lawless injustice, or sanguinary anger, or shameless riot. But there *is* danger, lest a succession of petty temptations to trivial insincerities and artifices should steal, step by step, upon the mind, destroy by degrees the nicety and clearness of honor, and relax the sturdy stiffness of unbending integrity; there *is* danger, lest the continual jarrings of contending interests should insensibly sour the temper, and produce a gradual misanthropy;—there *is* danger, lest the multitude of surrounding amusements should seduce you into a sufficient degree of dissipation, to enervate the noble energies of your nature, and introduce an effeminacy of spirit, that shall unfit you either for wrestling with adversity, or struggling with difficulty in any honorable cause to which duty may call you out;—unless these continually operating and insidiously encroaching tendencies are counteracted by a jealous vigilance, and by diligent endeavours to
cherish

cherish the spirit of honesty, charity, and fortitude.

Survey then your situation, inhabitants of this extensive town, and survey it with a serious eye;—consider it well;—count your dangers.—At once, *distracted by hurry,—dissipated by variety,—agitated by passion,—and attracted by temptation;*—you must fly to your temples and to your closets;—or, you are ruined:—relaxed in principle, corrupted at heart, if not stained with visible vice;—an easy conquest for powerful temptation, if not actually overcome;—feeble, if not fallen.

O LONDON! imperial city! how properly to thee may be said, what the solemn secretary of heaven addressed to an ancient church:—"I know thy charity." All nations know it;—thou pattern of public humanity to all the earth!—And, when I behold thee spreading a maternal wing over the sons and daughters of poverty and distress, —when I see thee adopting deserted infancy and cherishing indigent age, —giving bread to the hungry, health to the sick, and knowledge

knowledge to the ignorant;—providing shelter and restoration for wandering reason, — and retirement and penitence for fallen virtue: — when I behold the readiness and liberality of thine occasional contributions for the widow and the orphan, and observe the generosity that is so generally exercised by thy traffickers and merchants, (in this respect eminently “ the honorable “ of the earth,”) towards insolvent industry:—when I behold these fair and amiable works of thine:—I cannot but lament that almighty God “ has” *ought* “ against thee.” Why do not “ thy *prayers* and thine alms “ go up together for a memorial before “ him?” — Assert, my countrymen, the sincerity of your charity, by adding to the social, the sacred, duties.—Prove to all mankind, that you put your names upon lists of benevolent subscribers, from a better motive than either pecuniary indifference, or proud emulation, or moody sensibility;—make it evident that it proceeds from that steady principle of regard to God, to rectitude,

tude, and to society, which attracts together all the several virtues, causes them all to cohere in the temper, and to form that true integrity of character which temptation attacks in vain.

I ask your pardon for this trial of your patience. My solicitude to enforce a practice, that appears to me of the first importance, has carried me farther than I was aware. I thank you for your attention to-night, and on every former one; if, to that favor, you will add a faithful improvement of whatever I have said this season, which has received the assent of your understandings, the sum of my obligations will be complete.

I was never able to bid you farewell, nor am I now, without feeling myself affected with that uncertainty, which the length of our approaching separation creates, of our ever meeting again upon this occasion. That we shall not *all* resume our seats, appears to me to be probable, when I think only of mortality,

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lity, and throw my eye over this number. In that time, it is possible, eternal silence may arrest my tongue, and more than possible, that some ear, on which it now strikes, may be sealed for ever! You are said to “come forth as flowers, and to be cut down.”——The most flourishing among you may feel the scythe before your fields will feel it.—Hear me then, each individual, as if for the last time, while, with all the solemnity his presence can inspire, in whose hand is alike thy breath, and mine, I exhort thee to live in such a manner, that, whenever thy last hour shall come, thou mayest meet it with the manly composure, with which it becomes a Christian to die.

I wish you all the sincerest happiness, every personal and domestic enjoyment, and, more especially, that sweet and sacred peace, which results from a clear conscience, a chearful faith, and an unclouded prospect of eternal life.—In the valley of
trouble,

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trouble,—upon the pillow of death,—and
before the tribunal of God,—peace be with
you all! Amen.

T H E E N D.

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